

# Winsted woman weaves an acclaimed career

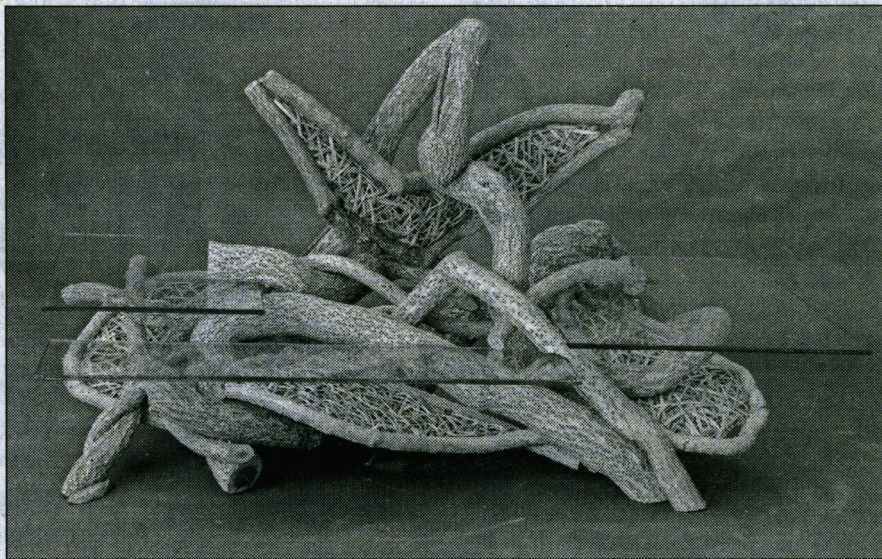
By GINA L. SARTIRANA  
*Staff Reporter*

WINSTED — Tucked away in her home-based studio on Perkins Street, Tina Puckett runs a small business that has earned her an international reputation as a master weaver.

Puckett first came to Winsted at age 14, when her parents bought a home on Highland Lake. The family moved around a great deal, living in New York City and Canada before coming back to Connecticut, where they lived in Westport and Bantam.

When Puckett was in her early 20s, her mother signed her up for a weekend basket-weaving class at the Forman School in Litchfield. Puckett walked away from the two-day class with a handmade basket and a skill she used to make Christmas presents that year.

“A couple of people loved them and asked me to make more and said they would pay me for them,” said



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TINA PUCKETT

Art enthusiasts will recognize Tina Puckett's creations as something far beyond simple weaving. An intricate coffee table and giant flowers convey a knack for carpentry and construction.



Puckett, who quickly began making baskets for retail sale.

In addition to selling to her friends and family, Puckett began selling her weavings in local stores wherever she lived, from a Gifted Hands store outside of Boston to her parents' store, the Litchfield Food Company, where her baskets were used for gift arrangements.

While Puckett loved what she was doing, she said she began to get bored making the same thing over and over again.

"I started working with grapevine, but that was the same thing," said Puckett. "One day I was picking grapevine and next to it was bitter-sweet and I never looked back."

Bittersweet, now the main

component of many of Puckett's pieces, is a wild vine that tends to choke trees. Pliable to work with it when first cut, it becomes very strong when it dries. And because it harms trees, Puckett said many people are grateful to her for harvesting the vine.

"It's not so rampant in Winsted, but in Litchfield it's all over."

With more than 25 years of weaving under her belt, Puckett is now considered a master weaver. She travels throughout New England displaying and selling her work. She spends at least 40 hours a week weaving and another 15 hours working in her office.

Much of the work involves finding places to exhibit her work. "It's very difficult to get into the high-end shows," Puckett said. "You can get accepted one year and not the next."

In addition to the New London Museum, Stamford Museum and Pen and Brush Gallery in Greenwich Village in New York City, Puckett's work has been seen at numerous art shows including the Westport Creative Arts Festival, American Craft Show in Charlotte, N.C., Virginia Fine Arts Festival in Reston, Va., the Coconut

Grove Arts Festival in Miami, Fla., and the Cheongju International Craft Biennale in Cheongju City, Korea. She has had her work displayed at Bradley International Airport and many other locations.

In addition to baskets, Puckett creates a variety of other woven pieces, from wall hangings and bowls to crescents and flowers. In recent years she

has created tables and dimensional weaving, a technique she created that features layers of different colors and textures.

"I had the concept of tables in my head for many years. One day I decided to go ahead and tackle it," said Puckett, who said a large piece of bitter-sweet was her original inspiration. "A lot of the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TINA PUCKETT

Tina Puckett's standing with her creations.

time the wood talks to me. It gives me a feeling of what it wants to be and this [bittersweet] definitely wanted to be a coffee table."

The large, four-layered table in Puckett's living room integrates bittersweet, custom glass and pieces of dimensional weaving.

Puckett said she gets excited when she sells something because it means she gets to begin working on a new piece to round out her inventory.

So why Winsted? Well, the location is what Puckett said attracted her back to town after so many years away. After closing her studio in Litchfield several years ago so she could travel more, Puckett said she was looking for a place that could house another studio, but also had easy access to the highway.

"I wanted a barn for a studio and I wanted to be in town," she said. "I like Winsted. I like the community. I like how I can walk to the post office and to the Y."

For more information on Tina Puckett and to view her work, visit [tinabaskets.com](http://tinabaskets.com). In addition to pieces displayed on the site, Puckett said she welcomes commissions.